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December 21, 2015

Honorable Kimba M. Wood
United States District Judge
Southern District of New York
United States Court House
500 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Judge Wood,

I write in support of Mir Islam, a successful graduate of The Focus Forward Project class. The Focus Forward Project, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing educational programming to federal pretrial inmates and individuals under pretrial supervision. The Focus Forward Project class is a twelve-week course designed to provide both an intellectual and emotional outlet for students as they navigate the stress and uncertainty of the pretrial phase of their federal case. The class meets once a week for two hours and participants are required to complete weekly reading and journal assignments. The first hour of each class is spent discussing and analyzing the book *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah. The second half of the class focuses on life skills, highlighting a different one each week. By the end of the course, participants walk away with a completed working resume, interview skills, conflict resolutions skills, public speaking skills, and both short and long-term goals. The mission of The Focus Forward Project is to provide participants with the confidence and skills to move forward successfully in their lives. Mir graduated from the course on Tuesday, August 26, 2014.

Mir was an invaluable participant in my class. From the very first day, it was obvious that he would bring light-hearted humor and laughter to our class discussions. He participated enthusiastically in all our discussions, whether we were talking about the book, covering various life skills, or just talking about the experiences the men were going through. Mir always had an insightful comment to share about his own experiences, or from his impressive wealth of trivia on subjects ranging from history to psychology. But he also displayed humility, opening up to the group about the frustration and disappointment he felt about finding himself in this situation. By the end of the class, he was able to build genuine friendships with his classmates.

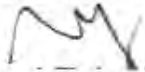
I came to know Mir as an intelligent and dedicated student. Although he occasionally struggled with the reading material, he always listened to his classmates' comments and was able to develop his own ideas and build on them from week to week. He allowed his classmates to help him develop his thoughts, and he showed marked improvement in his critical thinking and analytical skills as the class progressed.

For the Public Speaking unit in the class, Mir had to talk about a person in his life who had inspired him. I saw again evidence of his willingness to accept advice from those around him. He spoke movingly about a close friend and role model who has inspired him to mature, and become more thoughtful of others. He spoke about growing up, and learning to surround himself with positive and supportive friends. Mir revealed his developing interest in psychology and human nature, and how he hopes to use knowledge of those subjects to help people. As the class progressed, I watched him create positive goals for himself, and become more aware of how his life affects others.

I feel strongly that Mir's experiences have made him a wiser, more self-aware, more thoughtful person, and that he will continue to apply the lessons he's learned for the rest of his life.

Mir Islam is an intelligent, caring, supportive man with tremendous gratitude toward those who have helped him. I feel lucky to have gotten to know Mir and will remain supportive of him going forward, doing whatever I can to help him. My aim is to give you a view of Mir through my eyes after spending twelve weeks getting to know him. I appreciate the time Your Honor has taken to read my letter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly at the number listed below.

Sincerely,



Naomi Chakofsky-Lewy
The Focus Forward Project, Inc.
Project Coordinator/Class Facilitator
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